

BACK TO BAIRNSDALE AFTER A QUARTER OF A CENTURY

Having waited twenty five years for the Early Music Consort and Rippon Lea Dancers to return, local early arts enthusiasts were out in force when *An Afternoon in the Renaissance* was presented at Bairnsdale Uniting Church on May 31.

Few seats were left when over 250 patrons arrived from places as far afield as Yarram to the west, Omeo to the north and eastwards to Orbost. Guest of the Guild was Mrs Gwen Webb OAM, of Sale, who was head of Sale Regional Arts Centre in the 1980's when the Centre and the Guild combined to present three wide-ranging annual Renaissance Arts Festivals that were unequalled elsewhere in Australia – then or now!

The celebratory mood of the Bairnsdale audience was matched by fine music, elegant dancing – mainly from the Italian/Spanish repertoire – and East Gippsland's first experience of the Art of Gesture.

Annabel Green's gestured presentation of Portia's *The quality of mercy is not strained* from Shakespeare's the *Merchant of Venice* and Arbeau's *Sword Dance*, performed by Tonia Chapman, Liz Mackie, Dominique Murphy and Rod Laird, were highlights in a program of highlights.

Grace Edwards had her first outing with the Rippon Lea Dancers – what an occasion to do so! – and Roger Palmer played Renaissance music with the Consort for the first time. He had previously taken part in the *Llibre Vermell* performances.

The Guild thanks the Creative Gippsland Festival, Bairnsdale Advertiser, Bairnsdale Uniting Church and the libraries, churches, schools, information centres, art galleries, U3A groups and many other organizations and individuals who contributed to the promotion of this highly successful project.

With the famous "Cistine Chapel" ceiling of Bairnsdale's Catholic Church and the excellent acoustic, fine organ and dance space in the Uniting Church, this would appear to be an ideal place for the staging of a major Renaissance festival.

The reception accorded the recent *Afternoon in the Renaissance* promises success for such a venture and the Guild will give it careful consideration.

ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE TO GIPPSLAND PERFORMANCE

Thirty-five years ago, when the Early Music Consort of Melbourne was comprised of the six-member Hill family, when there was no dance team on hand, regional tours were easy.

In those early days the group performed as much in the country and interstate as in Melbourne. Now it is a different story and months of planning are required to arrange a venue and publicity as well as the provisions, accommodation and travel for musicians, dancers and an actress, as required for Bairnsdale.

But the one factor that has not changed over the years is the enthusiastic response of country people to early arts. Here are some examples from Bairnsdale. :

If Henry VIII happened to be in town over the weekend he would have certainly headed for Bairnsdale Uniting Church. (Bairnsdale Advertiser)

At least eight people called into my office on Monday and asked me to thank you for bringing your team of artists to Bairnsdale. (Email from teacher at Bairnsdale High School)

We are in awe at what you have achieved.
(Letter from a resident of Tambo Upper)

Helga Hill and her group of musicians, dancers and an actor created an atmosphere rarely encounter in this day and age. (Bairnsdale Advertiser)

I would like to express our appreciation of your company coming all the way to Bairnsdale. It has opened a new door for the boys (11 and 9) who just loved the whole experience. The younger one was absolutely enthralled by the virginal and the other was similarly in awe of the lute. Both boys were quite astonished by the costumes and dance and the same with the gesture piece from the "Merchant of Venice". The gesture brought it to life for them.
(Email from a family in Lakes Entrance)

Such responses make all the work worthwhile. Given that Melbourne is awash with early music concerts and festivals, it seems unfortunate that many ensembles overlook the welcome that awaits them in regional areas. The demand is certainly there for those who are prepared to travel.